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The
PAINTER
of
MAISONNAS

A New Year's Wish.

I pray not that the coming year
 Strew roses wheresoe'er you tread,
Nor that blue skies and morning sun
 Be ever bright above your head.

I do not pray your life be free
 From every petty care and trial,
Nor do I ask you ne'er should know
 The need of stringent self-denial.

But rather let me ask for you
 Courage the battle of life to face,—
Courage to face, the strength to fight,
 And faith to win the hardest race.

And I would ask, besides, a friend,
 To understand you all in all,
To take your hand when all seems lost,
 To trust you though the heavens fall.

THE
PAINTER OF MADONNAS

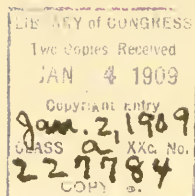
AND OTHER POEMS

BY

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The Painter of Madonnas

You ask, my fair friend, why I choose to live
A bachelor, and be content to give
Mind, heart, and soul to painting, as I do,
These pictures of a sex, it seems to you
My life, if it speaks aught, rather condemns
Than otherwise—these bits of fancy, too,
You and the world are pleased to title gems
Of art; why think with brush so loftily
Of woman, yet abjure her whole society!

I hold that sometime, somewhere, soon or late,
'Tis given to every man to meet his fate
In some one woman's face; and I met mine.

My years of youth I gave to waste and wine,
To hawk, to horse, and hunt, the nothingness

Of courtly foppery—yea, I confess
Frankly to you, not lightly though, the curse
Which fell upon my early life, and—worse
Or better—helped to make me what you find—
One given to worship what he hath resigned,
Renounced, made up his life without, a truth
That is as false as true, as true, insooth,
As false. You fail to understand the phrase?
Just as you do my alien—say you—ways
Of life. You thought, perhaps, I never knew
To love a woman generously and true,
Felt never the full burst of soul and bloom,
When love's red sunlight enters through the gloom
And strikes the fallow ground; perchance you think
The sun rose, roused the fallow ground, to sink
Only and leave it waster than before,
And drearier. In that you wrong me sore.

'Twas on a night like this, a night of June—
As like to this as moon may be to moon—

Forgive details, for though to you they seem,
Perhaps, but drift that only clogs the stream,
To me they are as much part of the whole
As eye is of the sight, or mind of soul.
A score of years and five indeed is long
To treasure up one day out of a throng
Of days so very like; but as one touch
Completes or spoils my Virgin, just so much
Serves to call forth from the abyss
Of hours, and make it live as this,
I speak of, lives with me, perfect to-day.
Aye, it was five and twenty years ago
Day after next, that I first learned to know
Love's genuine place and power in life, to weigh
It in the balance of eternal worth
And find it sovereign of all things on earth.

Yes—since you ask it—I had loved before,
Felt what, at least, in common parlance bore
The name; to speak full truth, such fancies were

But little rarer than the seasons of the year,
Neither less varied, but enough of these;
They passed like leaves in autumn from the trees.
Spring came again, but a perennial spring
To me. 'Twas at a ball given to the king,
The former king, my father's friend, I met
That face, and recognized and paid the debt
We owe to nature. I had passed the hours,
The evening through, with one I taxed my powers
In vain, convincing of my love. I vowed
To be her knight till death, her slave, and proud
To be a slave to her; or I would move
A mountain, dry the sea to woo her love.
She only laughed a little laugh of scorn. I went
In shame and anger to take leave, and meant
To heal the hurt in wine, but—this is how
It came to pass that from that day till now
I have forborne wine, and the courtly crew,
And hawk and hunt, and women—th' world and you
Say woman—to paint these pictures you admire;

Which, you are kind enough to say, inspire
In you a nobler hope for womanhood.

From all the rest of that gay throng
She stood apart, near where I passed; and down
Before her, softer than the satin gown
They rested on, were clasped her snow white hands—
Quite as in yonder half-done sketch she stands—
I somehow saw them, raised my eyes. 'Twere vain
To try describe the ecstasy, the pain
I lived that minute; this alone must do:
Whatever faith I had before, I knew
Then that there was a God in heaven.—This, here,
This Virgin, which requires a touch, is near
As I have come—however hard I strive—
To giving others that which will survive
In me life-long, and through the grave, I feel,
To life again. Despite my utmost zeal,
There's more within than I have power to place
Upon the cloth; more in the once seen face,

So lily-pure, rose-perfect, perfect eyes
And brow and mouth and all. This fails
In depth and purity of soul ; details
Of dress and form are accurately done,
But little better—if at all—than this, begun
Some twenty years ago, the earliest one,
But wait, I had not told you all ; her eyes,
Whose depths disclosed a pristine paradise
Of soul, as I stood statue-like, met mine,
And somehow rested there. No single sign,
As I recall—and well do I remember—of surprise,
Or fear, or question, crossed her countenance
Until we had stood minutes there in trance,
It seemed ; and then her silken lashes fell
Upon her lily cheek, and she was gone.
And I went out and wandered till the dawn.

I knew then that my time had come to throw
Aside the nothingness of life, outgrow
Vain self, and bury up the worthless past

Within a noble future. Fair and vast
The world expanded around me, quickened, grew
From twilight into daylight, blossomed through.
Old passes, gray and dim with darkness, turned
To flowering vistas; clouded heights that spurned
The sunlight now glowed purple; from the wold
Mists shrunk and left it haloed with pure gold.
Then foil and foible, tint and tinsel dropt
From life and left it lustrous; trifling stopt
And aims grew boundless. Purpose mounted high
With will to master those great arts that vie
In forms of noble beauty. He who loves
One face in all the thousands, ever moves
In highering circles, never is content
To rest but one thing, has his purpose bent
To be musician, sculptor, painter, yea,
And poet; yearning, striving thus in lay
Or statue, portrait, poem, to unseal
His soul's high secret; find for his ideal
An adequate expression; tries to cramp

His spirit into lyric, epic; stamp
A shapeless mass with form and feature; paint
A picture in the likeness of a saint
Or the Madonna, symbol to the heart
The nearest, of the object he enshrines
Within the holiest of holies, twines
His soul to, worships,—such, love's art.

So Petrarch for his love of Laura wrote
Those sonnets; Angelo's deft hammer smote
The graceless mass of marble into form
And feature; and above the wildering storm,
My heart assures me, poor Beethoven caught
Love's radiant sunlight, while his fingers wrought
The sweet sonatas. So my love for her
Paints these madonnas, which, your words aver,
Are worthy of the language they would speak.
And now you ask me why I did not seek
And claim her as my birthright; why forsake
The one great prize in life without a word

Said or deed dared. Just as you erred
Before, you err in this. The gem is mine—
Has been from that night forth, my light of life—
More perfectly, I hold, than wigged divine
Could make it by pronouncing man and wife,
More perfectly, more purely. How could I
Seek her whose very worth did prophesy
Against me, a nothing whose sole worth did lie
In the power to do, to be, that she had given?
From childhood I had never nobly striven
For any worthy object. Life meant to desire,
To have, and to enjoy ; true, visions higher
Flashed meteor-like athwart my random way
From out the golden realm where youth in May
Rears his fair castles. Splendidly I dreamed,
But the pursuit of these high passions seemed
Like following wandering fires ; and so I grew
Drifting to manhood, to the world and self untrue,
Not knowing my own falseness.

Then she came :

Light fell in floods, revealing my life's shame
And utter nakedness ; but faith came, too,
And hope, and power to be, and will to do
All that which makes a man. And from that day
Till now one only purpose has held sway
Over my life ; not merely to retrieve
A wasted past, but so to interweave
Truth that had blazed its way to my poor heart,
One simple truth in one truth-telling art,
That it might speak and all mankind assure
That one true woman, noble, gentle, pure,
Atones for all the sins of half a world
Of shallow natures. She has e'er unfurled
The banner of her sex, not they ; and stands
Supremely beautiful, where she commands
The motions of the world from her great height,—
A living power, a benediction ; and a light.
They only serve, in their poor idle way,
To make her glory greater.

The first day,
Yea, first day, after my new life began
Found me bound Romeward, there to live and scan
The work of Raphael and Angelo
And many another whose heart's sacred glow
Wrought everlastingly, embodying
In noble beauty those high truths that cling
To noble natures. How I stood amazed
In th' wonder of it all, as there I gazed,
Feeding my soul upon those glimpses caught
Out of eternity by minds that wrought
Against the rust of time! Yea, I was dazed,
And ghostly fears for one short moment razed
My hope to dust, as suddenly there dawned
Light that revealed how vast a region yawned
Between me and the glorious realm I sought;
But then a sea of joy surged back, befraught
With confidence and courage. Then to work
Undaunted, work that left no doubt to lurk
In shadowy corners. From gray dawn to dark

I labored ; many a morn I heard the lark
Ease his full throat in his long flight of song ;
My heart sang with his ; joy, however long
The day, was longer, for the once-seen face
Was with me, and a presence whose sweet grace
Filled ever all my world. I grew in power
Of grasp and of performance. With a dower
Like mine, 'twas little wonder ; for, each day
I grew in gift to apprehend what lay
Within that visioned countenance, behold,
Like love that giving grows, it did unfold
Rare beauties that I had not seen before ;
And thus I strove for seven years and more,
Seven fruitful years, in Italy, to learn
A language all-expressive, which would spurn
To speak but of the highest ; thus I came
To paint madonnas ; thus retrieved my shame ;
And then turned homeward.

Yes, there comes again
Your question, Why let years thus wax and wane

Without once venturing a deed or word
In my own heart's behalf? 'Think not there stirred
No passion in me, wrestled no desire
For conquest. To speak truth, consuming fire
Besieged, possessed me; with wild beasts I fought:
For on the eve of my return I caught
A sudden rumor thrilling through the land,
That princely Bertram, he at whose command
More vassals bow than people half a score
Of kingdoms such as ours, stood at her door
A suitor. Heralded and hailed he came,
With noble lineage, and wealth, and fame
That many a king might envy. How I longed
To take a rival place with him, how thronged
My brain with doubtful fancies, you, my friend,
Can only half imagine. In the end
My better angel triumphed, banished doubt
And self, enthroned plain duty, pointed out
The one true way that stretched before me, pledged
My faith in solemn pact unprivileged.

I held and hold that love's true function, end
For which the world was made, is just to blend
The soul with beauty, thrilled with purpose high;
To gladden, greaten, and to glorify
Life, render perfect what has failed, thro' fault,
Of its true consummation; to exalt
Steadfast endeavor, sanction truth, right wrong,
Turn gloom to sunshine, sorrow unto song.
What gain of good had I to hold my hope
Expectant? What expansion in the scope
Of mind's endeavor or fulfillment, growth
Of soul, had I to look for in a troth
Of lives between us? She belonged to all
High places, I but to the cloistered hall.
And should I, since she once benignly beamed
A sudden radiance downward, through mists gleamed
And void and darkness, to my corner poor
And dismal of the world, attempt to lure
Her hither, hem, confine her glorious light
Of day, to render my cramped cloister bright?

I knew a duke once whose whole life was spent
In one consuming passion. The extent
Of his broad lands, the horse, the hounds, the hunt,
His dukedom's weal,—such interests as are wont
To make up life, were things remembered not
By him. He gave unto his garden plot
His thought, his days. It was a fragrant sea
Of bud and blossom, where the luckless bee
Was drowned in sweetness, and for very love
The nightingale sat songless, while above
The chaste moon veiled her face! for every kind
Of rose, of every shape and size and hue
And scent the fertile mind of man could find
A name for, in this matchless garden grew.
And here the duke walked morning, noon, and night,
Walked and gazed rapt until his very sight
Grew sated. Then he crushed the wondrous rose
And held the shattered fragments to his nose.



There is a love diviner than the love

That sates itself in sweetness, joy above
The thrill of fond possession : angels white
Would lose in lustre if they stood each night
Before us. Beauty passes, reverence flows,
And glory dwindles from whatever grows,
Through frequency, common. So I fought the fight
And won it, kept my angel lustered white ;
So turned again to paint madonnas, turned
From longing unto labor, worked and learned
The joy of doing, such as no man knows
Until he finds his place appointed, glows
To fill it, works his work and lives his life
Untrammelled, unperplexed by paltry strife,
Conventions, rules, or frills of fashion, true
And loyal to the impulse thrilling through
Head, hand, and heart. And so I lead the plain
Lone life you question, lured by no false strain
Of siren voices. All the world gleams gold
Around me, glory stretches uncontrolled.

Love Lies A-Cold

In the cool garden closes,
Where summer and care
Have wrought beauty so rare;
Where the perfume of roses
Is spent on the air;
With a reticent glare,
The soft sunshine reposes
On the bright-blown flowers
For hours upon hours.

Not a breath stirs the willows,
That border the stream,
From their mid-day dream!
And the slow swelling billows
Are gathering each beam
From the sun, with a gleam
On the sea as it pillows
The shallops and skiffs
Beyond the clear cliffs.

LOVE LIES A-COLD

But the day shall shiver
And die ere a sound
Stir a leaf from the ground,
Or a voice wake a quiver
From the park to the mound,
Save the baying hound
Or the tremulous river;
For love lies a-cold
In the castle old.

From the night till the morning,
From morning till night,
When the last lonesome light
Fills the sky with its warning
Of the day's damask flight,
Neither lady nor knight,
The frail flowers scorning,
Shall pluck a red rose
From the garden's close.

And the bright breath of summer
 Shall pass into fall;
And the confident call
Of the busy-winged hummer
 Shall cease from the wall
 Where the woodbines crawl;
Nor the steps of the comer
 Of the now dead days
 Shall quicken the ways.

The gray gate shall crumble
 And turn into sand,
 But never a hand
Or a finger shall humble
 Itself to withstand
 The decay, till it brand
All the walls, and they tumble
 And turn into clay,
 For year and for day.

LOVE LIES A-COLD

And the flowers, forsaken,
 May wither and die :
 For the wind shall sigh,
And the branches be shaken ;
 But never a cry,
 Or a tear to the eye,
Shall it startle or waken ;
 For love lies a-cold
 In the castle old.

So the years shall wither
 By months and by days,
 From Mays unto Mays ;
And the sails flee thither,
 O'er the watery ways,
 From yonder bleak bays,
Where the moon and with her
 The timid stars shine
 On the barren sea-brine ;

And from father this story
Of love to the son
Shall descend; and none
Shall forget the old glory,
Till the sand be run
From his glass; or the sun
And the stars grow hoary,
And be not the lights
Of the days and nights.

But the castle and garden
Of the days then long dead,
Awhile love was shed
O'er the walls that guard on
The west, shall be wed
To waste, and each bed
To a stone shall harden;
For love lies a-cold
In the castle old.

Song of Autumn

I come on the wings of the south-wind ;
On the wings of the south and east ;
I tarry in forest and meadow,
And spread out my harvest-feast.

I am life, I am death, and harvest,
The soul of the summer and spring,
The end of their budding and blooming,
Of the months and the years I am king.

My coffers are full ; I give freely
To the strong and the weak as well ;
To man, and the birds of the meadow,
The squirrel and fox in the dell.

For mine are the barley and wheat fields,
The apples of red and green,
The chestnuts of brown on the hilltops,
And the fields of corn between.

For me grapes in purple cluster,
Hang low on the laden vine;
And orchards of pears and peaches
Their garlanded heads incline.

I bring unto all a blessing
From inland lake to sea;
I strew the highlands with plenty,
The valleys I fill with glee.

No dingle may lie so hidden
That I do not spy it out,
And fill with the wealth of my treasures
Each distant and secret redoubt.

For all countries are my dominions,
From pole to equator and pole ;
And my coursers are swift as the lightnings
To bear me from goal to goal.

Then I flee on the wings of the north-wind,
On the wings of the north and west ;
And leave to the keeping of winter
The lands that I have blest.

At Even-Tide

The western sky in crimson dyed
Sinks softly o'er the earth's dark breast,
Shedding abroad a lingering rest,
At even-tide.

The shadows climb the mountain-side
One after one with solemn pace,
As if aspiring into space,
At even-tide.

How listlessly the light boats glide
Reflected in the gleaming mere,
While the lone heron hovers near,
At even-tide.

And ere the vesper chimes have died

The monk's low hymn, the chant, the prayer
Rise trembling on the darkening air,
At even-tide.

The patient flocks lie down beside

The fold, and their meek spirits blend
With nature, in the day's sweet end,
At even-tide.

The brown bright thrushes sing and hide;

A sigh is echoed from the hill;
A star shines out and all is still,
At even-tide.

As the King Passed By

As the king passed by, thro' the narrow street,
With a thousand menials in his train,
Ready to catch the downcast rein,
Or lie in the dust at his princely feet,
A peasant sat in his lowly door,
And the sunshine lay on his cottage floor,

As the king passed by.

And unto himself the peasant said,
As he caught the shimmer of purple and gold,
And saw the menials young and old
Attend each turn of the royal head:
"How enviable a man is he—
A life of ease and of minstrelsy!"

As the king passed by.

As the king passed by, his eye beheld
The peasant sitting by his door,
And the warm sunlight on his floor.
And 'neath the purple his weary heart swelled,
And he sighed: "What were it worth to be
Like yonder peasant, trammel-free!"

As the king passed by.

The Day is Done

Ave Maria! all the day is done.

The red sun settles in the burning west;
Along the eastern mountains' jagged crest
The growing shadows gather one by one,
Ave Maria! all the day is done.

Ave Maria! 'tis the eventide,
And all creation rests from strife;
A little while of peace creeps into life;
Our work day masks and mimes are laid aside,
And we return unto ourselves, at eventide.

Ave Maria! as the dusk descends
A cooling breeze strikes our flushed face,
And we begin to feel how fair a place
Life fills—how large in love; for heaven lends
To earth a glory as the dusk descends.

Dawn and Dusk

A tremulous silence, a void of mist,
A shroud over wood and wold,
A depth of grey, then amethyst
And furroughing fields of gold.

White drifts of cloud that hurry by,
And silvery waves that lap the sand,
A growing softness across the sky,
A mellow music thro' all the land.

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